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## AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION A NECESSITY

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Thirty years ago and more, that great-hearted and far-seeing Southern poet, Sidney Lanier, gave us the keynote of Southern development in a paragraph that every Southern schoolboy ought to learn by heart:

"A vital revolution in the farming economy of the South, if it is actually occurring, is necessarily carrying with it all future Southern politics, and Southern relations, and Southern art, and such an agricultural change is the one substantial fact upon which any really New South can be predicated."

It is Lanier's old message that I would now bring to my readers, and yet I bring a new message too: that at last we have definitely set about the fulfilment of his dream. To tell what this means to the South and to the nation, and to arouse, if possible, more earnest support in carrying it to success, is the object with which I shall write. As the background of my story and in order that we may see its large meaning in the right perspective, I must first of all call attention to two statistical facts:

(1) The overwhelming predominance of rural interests in the South, the census shows that more than eighty per cent of our population is rural, and that the South is to-day the one section of America of which it is true that there are more people engaged in agriculture than in all other occupations combined.

(2) The efficiency and earning power of these people heretofore. The last census showing the average annual value of products per farm in the North Atlantic states as \$984, in the South Atlantic as \$484, or exactly \$500 per year less in South Atlantic than in North Atlantic; in the North Central states as \$1,074; in the South Central, \$536, or \$538 per year less in South Central than in North Central.

With this as my basis, I am ready to lay down three or four propositions which I wish to drive home to my readers.

1. To bring up its earning power \$500 more a year for each Southern farm is the supreme task and opportunity of our generation.

2. It is not only our supreme task and ambition, but it is a realizable ideal, a workable, practicable program of progress.

3. It is not only our supreme task, and a realizable one, but one upon the success of which depends the prosperity not only of the South as a section and Southerners as a whole, but also, and more important, the prosperity of every individual Southerner—the farmer no more than the banker, the merchant, the railroad man, the lawyer, the preacher, the teacher, the statesman. The prosperity of every trade, art, and craft in a community and the prosperity of every individual in the community, from the boy on the street who blacks your shoes to the master mind who organizes your railway systems or governs your state—the prosperity of every man, I say, depends upon the prosperity of the average man, this average man in the South being a farmer—and this is the greatest truth that I hope to bring out in this paper.

4. Then the hopeful fact that already earnest men and women, working here and there in different lines of endeavor have developed almost unawares the several component parts of a fairly comprehensive and well-rounded scheme of rural development, a primary and essential part of which is this getting \$500 more a year farming in the Southern States—a scheme of education which embraces young and old, not only the farm boy in the school, but the adult farmer and the farmer's wife as well.

#### *Commercial Significance*

As a spokesman of the South's agricultural interests, I am going to base my argument not on any plea as to what this rural development will mean to the South as a section or to Southerners as a whole, but upon what it will mean to the individual. My hope is to show that the prosperity of each individual Southerner is dependent upon the prosperity of the average man in the South, this average man, I repeat, being a farmer. Too long a large element of our people have cherished a different feeling. Too long—tragically too long—men have thought or said: "If I am a merchant,

lawyer, manufacturer, preacher, railway man, banker or teacher, it matters little to me, except, of course, as a matter of altruism or benevolence, whether agriculture prospers or not, whether the man in the field is ignorant or educated, is progressing or retrogressing, is prospering or suffering."

This is the feeling that has cost the South leadership. This is the sentiment that has kept our manufactures, our commerce, our literature, our education—that has kept one and all of these chained down to the unprofitable level of our unprofitable average man, our man behind the plow. Increase his earning capacity and you increase the earning capacity of every other worker in the South; free him from the claims of unprofitable because misdirected labor, and you cut the hindering shackles of every other worthy interest in the Southern States. If our statesmen and public men in the South these last thirty years could only have realized the fundamental truth in Lanier's utterance! If they only could have realized that the prosperity of every man depends upon the prosperity of the average man!

I do not know whether or not it has ever been worked out as a principle of political economy, but it is unquestionably true that wealth is by nature not aristocratic, but democratic. The poorer every other man is, the poorer you are. The richer every other man is, the richer you are. Every man whose earning power is below par, below normal, is a burden on the community; he drags down the whole level of life, and every other man in the community is poorer by reason of his presence, whether he be white man, or Negro, or what not. Your untrained, inefficient man is not only a poverty-breeder for himself, but the contagion of it curses every man in the community that is guilty of leaving him untrained. The law of changeless justice decrees that you must rise or fall, decline or prosper with your neighbor. You will be richer for his wealth, poorer for his poverty. So to-day every man in the South who is tilling an acre of land so that it produces only half as much as intelligently-directed labor would get out of it, is a burden on the community, is dragging down the level of life for every other man in the community. Suppose you are his fellow-citizen; then because of his inefficiency, his poverty, because of his failure to contribute to public funds and public movements, you must have poorer roads, poorer schools, a meaner school-house and court-house, a

shabbier church, lower priced lands; your teacher will be more poorly paid, your preacher's salary will be smaller, your newspaper will have a smaller circulation, your town will have a poorer market, your railroad smaller traffic, your merchant smaller trade, your bank smaller deposits, your manufacturer diminished patronage, and so on and so on.

### *Negro Efficiency and Immigration*

The ramifications are infinite, unending. The doctrine is true whatever the color of the man. The ignorant Negro in the South to-day is a great economic burden, and as a rule states and communities are prospering in proportion to their white population. I do not know what we are going to do with the Negro. I do know that we must either frame a scheme of education and training that will keep him from dragging down the whole level of life in the South, that will make him more efficient, a prosperity maker and not a poverty-breeder or else he will leave our farms and give way to the white immigrant. No acre of land will long own as its master, the man or the race who mistreats it and makes it unfruitful. It is a fatal misconception that the South can be helped or that any southern industry can be helped by having the Negro ignorant or poor. Our greatest need to-day is for more intelligent and better trained labor, and we must either have the Negro trained or we must not have him at all. Untrained, he is a burden on us all. Better a million acres of untilled land than a million acres of mis-tilled land.

Let us remember then that our economic law knows no color line. White or black, the man whose efficiency is above par, economically considered, is a help; white or black, the man whose efficiency is below par is a hindrance.

Of all our errors here in the South our greatest has been the failure to recognize the fact that the prosperity of every man depends upon the prosperity of the average man—and in many cases the actual acceptance of the doctrine that the state is benefited by having cheap, untrained labor. We now see, on the contrary, that such labor is a curse. Our second great error has been like unto it—the belief that even if the prosperity of every man does depend upon the prosperity of the average man, we are too poor to train him. The truth is that we are too poor not to do so.

The fullest and freest training of the average man is the one and only positive guarantee of Southern prosperity. By this I mean the prosperity not only of our section, and of our institutions, and of society as a whole, but the prosperity of every individual—every farmer, laborer, merchant, manufacturer, and professional man; every inhabitant, as I have said, from the boy who blacks your shoes to the master mind that builds your railroad systems or governs your state. Having once accepted this doctrine concerning the average man—and the average man in the South being a farmer—we shall not be slow to put into effect that large and comprehensive program of rural development which earnest men and women, working in many different lines have gradually brought into shape—a program which looks to the ultimate doubling of the output and the more than quadrupling of the profits of that occupation which engages the attention of more people in the South than all other occupations combined.

### *Revolution Now Begun*

Then indeed will the South blossom as the rose; then indeed will the old ambitions of our fathers come at last into glorious fruitage. Not only will the common farm homes in the South be supplied with all the conveniences our city brethren now enjoy, good roads and telephones, and fine stock and fat acres greet the glad eyes of an awakened people, but every industry known to our Southland will throb with new vigor as if fresh blood had been poured into its veins. Great mercantile houses will grow up among us rivaling those of the North and West, and southern merchants will make the big profits that come with big sales instead of the small profits inevitable with small sales. Merchants in the West are selling automobiles to farmers; compare, if you will, the profits on automobiles and ox-carts. Manufacturers of a thousand things for which there is now no profitable Southern market, we shall have; and our laboring men, finding room for greater skill and higher wages, will walk with quicker step and lighter hearts. Bankers will no longer own allegiance to other sections, but our own financial institutions will become the equals of any in America. Our newspapers will grow greater, with stronger subscription and advertising patronage, and northern men and women will begin to read southern magazines and southern dailies. Our railroads will double-track old

lines, to supply the new demands, and new lines will be built to quicken dead sections into life. Able lawyers will no longer go North to find big fees, foreign pulpits will no longer be able to take our strong religious leaders from us, our poet-souls and artist-souls will find here at last the atmosphere in which they best can flourish, our statesmen will speak with potent voices in the councils of the nation, and the eye of every Southern schoolboy will sparkle with a keener pride as he learns the story of a generation that has wrought as well in peace as the fathers fought in war. These are the things we have now set out to win; these are the things which are to come about with the agricultural revolution upon which alone any really New South can be predicated.

I have no time in this brief paper to speak in detail of the plans by which our five hundred dollars more a year per farm may be realized. Suffice it to say that we shall manage the land itself better, now more barbarously handled by Americans than by any other civilized people. Land is "wearing out" with us in ten, twenty, or thirty years, whereas I walked over lands in Europe which had been cultivated for centuries before our forefathers first heard that an Italian named Columbus had discovered a continent beyond the seas—and these lands now produce even bigger crops than then. We shall grow stock and so get two profits from land instead of one. We shall make more farm manures and so save millions a year on fertilizers. We shall use improved seed and improved stock, and very nearly double our profits through this one change. We shall use more horse-power instead of one-horse power. In a hundred other ways we shall improve the South's agricultural practice, bringing it up to Northern and Western standards and thereby to Northern and Western profits. By reading farm papers and keeping up with our experiment stations and agricultural leaders, the reader can learn the plans by which the reform is to be brought about; I have space here only to speak of the agencies to be used.

#### *Agencies to Be Used*

First of all, then, there is the school. We must double the energy we are putting into our great educational crusade. There is no time to dispute about the forms of education. We need more common school education, more high school education, more college education, more technical education, more classical education. But

without disparaging the college or the university, I would say that first of all, we must give greater attention to the public schools. It is in them that the farmer, the average man, gets his education. We cannot improve our farming until we educate our farmers; we cannot develop the South until we develop our Southerners.

Nor is it enough that we have longer public school terms; we must have better public schools. We must make them train for life, for practical things. Teach the farm boy how cotton and corn and tobacco may be improved by seed selection; how a plant feeds, and how soils are exhausted; what elements are found in common feed stuffs, and which make fat and which make muscle; which cows make money in the dairy, and which should be selected for beef—and a thousand other things. Not only should the elements of agriculture be a public school study in the rural districts, but there should be a revolution in the text-books for other studies. In your spelling-book, for instance, where do you find such words as nitrogen, potash, protein, or even such common farm words as clevis, single-tree, mattock, etc.? Made by city people for city people, the books and teaching have not been adapted to the needs of the country children. We shall take a long step forward when the farm boy has proportionately fewer problems in arithmetic about foreign exchange, and latitude and longitude and the metric system, and more about how to calculate a feeding ration for cows or a fertilizer formula for certain quantities of potash, phosphoric acid and nitrogen, and when he studies proportionately less about far-away Australia and Kamchatka, and more about the soil that he walks over and plows in every day of his life. The farmer girl, too, must learn of food values, of the chemistry of cooking, of hygiene, and of sanitation. Domestic science for the girls must go side by side with agriculture for the boys. Agricultural high schools will continue this work, and the agricultural college will carry the process still further for those who are to be leaders.

Much as the agricultural colleges, the agricultural high schools, and agriculturalized common schools, will do for the farmer, their good effects can hardly be seen until the next generation, but we cannot wait until the next generation for our deliverance. Fortunately for us, therefore, there are a dozen agencies which are educating the adult farmer, no less effectively than the schools are educating the farmer's boy.

*Educating Grown-Up Farmers*

Chief among these agencies, in my opinion, are the farm papers, the farmers' co-operative demonstration work, farmers' clubs and the farmers' institutes. The farm press of the South has doubled in efficiency in ten years, and the millions of pieces of literature it distributes yearly—practical farm experiences, clear-cut agricultural philosophy, the teachings of scientists and experimenters interpreted for the every-day farmer—this never-ceasing practice-school with its millions of working pupils makes a leaven that would of itself ultimately leaven the whole lump. But there are, as I have said, a dozen other agencies, all working to the same end, and each one of them deserves its share of praise.

The farmers' institutes are of the most far-reaching benefit, bringing as they do the agricultural leaders of each state face to face with the farmer, and not these leaders only, but often agricultural machinery, agricultural equipment, etc., which the farmer would not otherwise come to understand. Lately the scope of these institutes has been extended so as to include farmers' wives as well, and no branch of educational endeavor of which I know has brought greater results for the money and effort expended than just this.

Farmers' clubs are also doing an immensely useful work. Once we had farmers' organizations which studied politics chiefly; now we have the Farmers' Union with millions of members in the South whose chief object is to encourage scientific farming.

Perhaps, however, the most immediately effective plan ever originated for helping the southern farmer is through what is called the Farmers' Co-operative Demonstration Work—a plan of such patent merit that it is a wonder Adam did not think of it. As a matter of fact, however, it was begun but a few years ago by the National Department of Agriculture, is under the direction of Dr. Seaman A. Knapp, and the idea has since been adopted by more than one state department of agriculture. The plan is to have a strong man, a great agricultural leader like Dr. Knapp, at the head of the general movement. Then in each state the most successful and most progressive farmer who can be had is named as state agent. Similarly in each county or district, the best farmers join in as local agents—and so on, until hundreds and thousands of farmers are enthusiastically at work, each one acting under instructions from

the most progressive and successful farmer of his neighborhood. This system of helping the farmer is of inestimable benefit. Only a few weeks ago I saw a statement from Harrison County, Texas, signed by the leading bankers and business men, declaring that the work in the preceding twelve months alone has been worth \$100,000 to that one county. The obdurate farmer may scoff at learned bulletins, he may refuse to be "preached at" by farmers' institute lecturers, and he may ignore test farm experiments as "not practical," but he falls right into the ranks with the great forward movement of agricultural progress when a practical, money-making farmer of his own acquaintance becomes his captain—or rather his teacher, guiding his hand, as it were, while he learns to write the new and magical letters of science and profit upon his own soil.

#### *Four Facts All Southerners Should Remember*

1. Not only does the prosperity of the South as a whole depend upon the prosperity of the average southerner, but the well-being of every individual is measured by the efficiency of this average man. Inevitably we are poorer for his poverty, richer for his wealth.

2. The great majority of these common people of the South being farmers, Sidney Lanier was right when he declared that "an agricultural change is the one substantial fact upon which any really New South can be predicated."

3. The possibilities of "such an agricultural change" are indicated by the fact that the average value of products per farm for the South Atlantic states is \$500 less per year than for the North Atlantic, and for the South Central \$538 less than for the North Central.

4. This agricultural revolution can be brought about only by a better scheme of rural education—better both in quantity and quality; not only longer terms, but with a curriculum adapted to the needs of country children. This rural education, too, must not stop with the children, but must be carried on among farmers and farmers' wives, and land-owners, and tenants, and farm managers—all of these being educated as definitely as the schoolboy himself, by means of farmers' institutes, and agricultural colleges, and farm papers, and farmers' clubs, and demonstration work.

In fact, it is the one immediate and imperative duty of Southern citizenship, to see that in every state a comprehensive and well-rounded policy of rural development is inaugurated and prosecuted with unfailing earnestness—this being at once the most important and the most neglected resource of Southern progress.